

# THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION, AMBLESIDE,

FOR THE TRAINING OF PRIVATE TEACHERS.



Photo. Bell, Ambleside.

THE AVENUE LEADING TO THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION.

By K. R. HAMMOND.

THE House of Education is a unique training college, the character of which can be understood only in the light of its history. Therefore, before describing it, I will briefly review the story of its development.

In the winter of 1885 and 1886 a series of lectures on Home Education (since published in book form) was delivered in Bradford by Miss Charlotte M. Mason. These lectures were the fruit of wide practical experience, as well as much thought and study. They were addressed primarily to parents, and their aim was "to suggest a method of education resting upon a basis of natural law"—"education" being understood to mean not merely instruction but the whole process of up-bringing, "the preparation of a child to take his place in the world at his best, with every capacity for good in him developed into a power," and every evil tendency suppressed.

Miss Mason related how she had embarked on the work of education with high ideals and a fund of energy and hope; how it had been

borne in upon her by experience that, spite of all her ardour, care, and love, progress in mind and character was only that of a door on its hinges—to-day a swing forward, to-morrow a swing back. The children still behaved ill or well "as 'twas their nature to." "Consideration," she says, "made the reason of the failure plain. It was due to the fact that children, though there is a warm glow of goodness at the heart of every one of them, have not the strength of will to make themselves do what they know is right. Here is one of the main problems of education: How to supplement that weakness of will?"

The answer came in a phrase which Miss Mason constantly heard repeated and insisted upon in the pulpit: *Habit is ten natures*. No sooner did this idea of the force of habit come home to her than it proved itself in numberless instances of everyday experience, in habits of reticence, neatness, courtesy; of stammering, sulkiness, passion; while the feats of clowns and acrobats illustrated the power of habit to force

nature into extraordinary channels. Hence one function of education is the formation of good and prevention of bad habits.

This has all been known since the days of Solomon ; it is a matter of common experience ; it has passed into a proverb ; but *why* and *how* is it so ? Can science explain it ?

Miss Mason tells us that she found the clue to the problem in Dr. Carpenter's book on Mental Physiology, where he shows how "tissues"—bone, muscle, or nerve—are actually worn away by their activity, and in the process of renewal are modified to the exigencies of that activity, so that the bones of an acrobat, the muscles of a dancer, and the nerves of a tea-taster are actually modified by their peculiar employment. But this is true also of the brain, for the nerve-tissue of this organ, being ceaselessly worn away by its activity and as incessantly renewed, is modified—like every other part of the body—according to the manner in which it is exercised, so that a flippant, orderly, or truthful habit is actually a physical thing, for a thought, or feeling, or resolution which is often repeated, or is once very vividly present in the mind, actually moulds the brain. Thoughts

are like travellers : the pioneer makes a track ; others following deepen and widen the path, which becomes the regular channel of traffic. But a second, different path may be opened by the enterprise of some later traveller and may divert all the passengers from the first road, which consequently becomes overgrown, and finally disappears altogether. Thus "one custom overcometh another."

" Sow a thought, reap an act ;  
Sow an act, reap a habit ;  
Sow a habit, reap a character."

Lessons, Miss Mason has come to look upon as neither more nor less than "instruments of education," *i.e.*, means of giving a child's mind the food and exercise needed for its growth—"exercise" comprising all such employment as shall form habits of attention, accuracy, imagination, reasoning, etc., and "food" consisting of vital thoughts and clear knowledge which is not merely stored in the memory but digested and assimilated by the mind.

But we know clearly only that to which we have attended, *i.e.*, which we have allowed to make an impression on us ; and we attend most easily and surely to that which interests



Photo, Bell, Ambleside.

THE TERRACE AT SCALE HOW : TRADITION SAYS THAT THIS WALK WAS A FAVOURITE ONE OF THE POET WORDSWORTH.



us; therefore, lessons must be bright and interesting.

The result of Miss Mason's lectures was that the audience, a small but enthusiastic gathering of parents, formed themselves into an association for the promotion of Education on the lines advocated, which has since developed into that widespread society, the Parents' National Education Union. Very soon arose a demand for private teachers trained in these principles, and to meet this demand a training college, the House of Education, was founded by Miss Mason in January, 1892. It is necessary to give this indication of the history of the House of Education in order to make it quite clear what are its aims and what its scope; what it is, and what it is not. It is not a school or even a college in the ordinary sense. It does not aim at bringing students to such a degree of proficiency in one or more special subjects as shall enable them to pass certain examinations and acquire certain honours. Its aim is to train girls for the work of education by giving them the necessary knowledge as to the broad facts and laws of a child's life: mental, moral and spiritual no less than physical; the necessary high ideal of education; the necessary skill in teaching.

The House of Education has gradually grown from a very small beginning to its present size, the College being twice moved, as it outgrew its premises, to larger buildings in the neighbourhood. It is situated most pleasantly just outside Ambleside, that "axle in a wheel of beauty," in the very midst of the sublime mountain and lake scenery of Cumberland, and within easy reach of Windermere, Rydal, and Grasmere. Not least among the charms of a student's life here is the daily companionship of these mountains, lakes and streams, each of which we learn to love as a personal friend. The feast of beauty is so inexhaustible, so perennially new, that our daily walk is always pleasant and recreative; that each half-holiday finds us eager to climb some yet unmastered height and to enlarge our circle of familiar ground; while half-term holidays are never-to-be-forgotten days of happiness and fun. For then we make up parties among ourselves, charter coaches and make a day of it, driving to some more distant place of special beauty or interest, such as

Keswick, Coniston, the foot of Helvellyn, or Ullswater, where we scramble and explore and admire to our heart's content, starting home at twilight and driving along the silent, darkening hills, while the stars come out one by one, and the moon, perhaps, rises over a distant peak.

There is a time-table for the students' day, and they are not expected or desired to work "out of school." The necessity for finishing each thing in its own time and the extreme value which odd moments acquire in a busy life tend to foster attention and rapidity of work. Since, as Miss Mason tells us, it is the work we cannot finish which burdens us and leads to brain worry, the House of Education student is not in danger of overwork. She is also provided with constant change of thought; for it is evident that so large a number of subjects provides much variety, and that prevents the eight hours of actual class work from becoming wearisome.

The art of teaching, like every other art, can be acquired only by practice. Therefore in connection with the College there is a Practising School, composed of a number of children varying in age from 6 to 17, and arranged in classes under three teachers. The advanced students carry on this school, three of them taking it for a week at a time. The School-room is a pleasant, light building in one of the prettiest parts of the garden, standing near a group of lovely beeches and itself covered by creepers, in which every year some bird is sure to make its nest, to the inexpressible joy of the children, who take the greatest interest in every stage of the little family's life.

I now come to one of the most delightful branches of our work—Nature-study. I will not call it *science*, for, though lectures are given on Botany, Geology, and Natural History, the main and most vital part of the work is done out of doors in observing every phase of the life of every "common object of the country," and thus learning to really know and love every bird, beast, insect, and plant. It is impossible to convey to those ignorant and careless of these things any idea of the world of joy and interest that is revealed when our eyes and ears are opened.

In connection with this field-work every student keeps a Nature note-book, *i.e.*, a diary of her observations and adventures, illustrated

by careful brush-drawings of flowers, insects, etc. Experience has shown that almost everyone can paint well enough to make her book very soon a source of great joy to her—in the present, and also in the future when re-reading these records she seems to turn back the pages of time and live once more those days in the lovely land of lake and hill.

Handicrafts are a great feature of the House of Education training: Cardboard sloyd, paper folding, clay modelling, basket making, needle-work, wood carving, book binding, brass work, and leather work are all learnt here, and happy

in the matter of interest), punctuated by walks, climbs, expeditions, picnics, and boating, or hockey, skating, and tobogganing, according to the season; literary evenings, impromptu fancy dress balls, acting, etc. Too soon, weeks, months, terms, and years have fled; the close of our training has come; it is a time of being weighed in the balance; the results of our two years' work (as far as they can be measured) are tested by Final Criticism Lessons given before one of H.M. Inspectors, and then by a number of searching, wide-reaching examination papers set by him on every part of the



*Photo, Watmsley Bros.*

STUDENTS OF THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION AT WORK IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS.

indeed are the hours spent in these delightful occupations.

Senior students enjoy an additional privilege in being permitted to attend weekly lectures by Mrs. Firth, a much-valued friend of the Principal and of the House, on Italian art, illustrated by innumerable photographs, and illuminated by the criticisms and appreciations of painters and pictures contained in Mr. Ruskin's works.

The days fly by with incredible speed, owing, I suppose, to the pleasant succession of widely-different studies and occupations (uniform only

ground we have covered. Then dawns that sad December day when a last farewell must be said to studenthood, and in the dim light of the winter morning a very silent coachful of ex-seniors drives along the well-known road by the side of the peaceful opal-tinted lake to Windermere station, each one of us looking back with wonder to that January afternoon nearly two years ago, when for the first time, with feelings of suspense in which curiosity outweighed anxiety, she passed that way, writing the first words of that pleasant chapter to which even now "Finis" is being added.



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## The May Queen of Great — Amwell.

### A SCHOOL- CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL.

THE old-time observance of the first of May by festivals consisting of dances round the Maypole, and of light-hearted frolics on the part of girls and boys, is becoming gradually revived in England. We know of the interest that

Ruskin took in the revival of May Day observance, and of the festivals inspired by him that take place every year at Whitelands College, Chelsea, and the Cork High School. We have read, lately, of the stately election of the May Queen of Ottawa, and we are also

fortunate in this number to see a picture of a May Day observance by some gay-hearted American College girls.

The Festival which this article is designed to tell of is less elaborate than any of those named, since it is the effort of village school-children, but it holds its own with them for prettiness of effect. It was as recently as last May that an attempt was made to revive the old May Day festival among the school-children of Great Amwell, in Hertfordshire, and a village green was extemporised in the Vicarage grounds. The proceedings commenced with "Come, Lasses and Lads," sung by children who had no special part in the more important proceedings of the day. The song concluded, nine little milkmaids, attired in blue print dresses and quaint white mob caps, tripped daintily up the path, round the green once, and then, forming a ring with their stools and pails, danced "The Chain," falling back after their dance in a line to the right of the throne.

The sound of a horn then preluded the advance of twelve doughty foresters, who made a brave show as they marched briskly round in green tunics and holland trousers, their straw hats decked with cocks' feathers. The foresters, who were armed with bows and arrows, formed in a line opposite



THE MAY QUEEN OF GREAT AMWELL, SUPPORTED BY FOUR PAGES, WHO REPRESENT THE SEASONS.



SEVEN OF THE TWELVE DOUGHTY FORESTERS WHO ANNOUNCE THE COMING OF THE QUEEN.